

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CREDITING A PLAYER OF A GAMING MACHINE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No.(not assigned), filed September 11, 2003 (Attorney Docket No: 60518,169) and is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/967,571, filed September 28, 2001.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to gaming machines, and more particularly, to a system and method for crediting a player of a gaming machine.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The growth and competition in the casino gaming market in recent years and the increasingly sophisticated and complex technology being integrated into the gaming environment, at the individual game, casino management, and auditing levels, presents both challenges and opportunities to game manufacturers, gaming establishment operators, and regulatory agencies. The technological capabilities and requirements of, for example, advanced electronic games, multi-site gaming operations, detailed player tracking, wide area progressive jackpots, and various alternatives to the use of currency and coins by players, all present a potentially huge pool of ever-changing data which can

be of great value to casino operators (from a management standpoint) and to regulators from an audit/compliance standpoint.

[0004] One area that has received a lot of attention in recent years has been providing added bonuses or incentives to players of electronic gaming machines, such as video slot machines video poker machines. An award may be selected at random or be based on a player's previous level of play. Once a player has met the selected criteria, the award in credits paid from the machine's hopper is released.

[0005] Players may also be given an incentive through a player tracking club. Usually, a player is identified during play by a player tracking ID card and/or a player identification number (PIN). The player tracking system tracks the player's play and awards player tracking points according to established criteria. The player tracking points may be redeemed for prizes, such as complimentary meals or merchandise.

[0006] However, both of these systems are inflexible and do not provide the casino operator with the maximum benefit and advantages available from the information and systems now available.

[0007] The present invention is aimed at one or more of the problems as set forth above.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION AND ADVANTAGES

[0008] In a first aspect of the present invention, a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The player has a player account stored in a computer coupled to the gaming machine. The computer including a database for

storing vouchers having a parameter. Each voucher having a first number of bonus points and being assignable to the player account.

[0009] In a second aspect of the present invention, a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The player has a player account stored in a computer. The computer being coupled to the gaming machine and including a database for storing vouchers. Each voucher having a parameter related to an expiration of the voucher. The method includes the steps of assigning a first number of bonus points to a first voucher, assigning a first expiration date to the parameter of the first voucher, and assigning the first voucher to the player account.

[0010] In a third aspect of the present invention, a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine with incentive points is provided. The player has a player account stored in a computer. The computer is coupled to the gaming machine and includes a database for storing vouchers. Each voucher has a parameter. The method includes the steps of assigning a first number of bonus points to a first voucher, defining the parameter of the first voucher as being one of cashable and non-cashable, and assigning the first voucher to the player account.

[0011] In a fourth aspect of the present invention, a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The gaming machine is capable of accepting a variable wager. The variable wager has a maximum wager value. The player has a player account stored in a computer. The method includes the steps of crediting the player account with a first number of bonus points and downloading the first number of bonus points to a player tracking device coupled to the gaming machine as a first

number of credits. The method further includes the steps of allowing the player to place a wager, playing the gaming machine, decrementing the wager from the credit meter, decrementing the maximum wager from the player tracking device, and crediting the maximum wager to the credit meter.

[0012] In a fifth aspect of the present invention, a system for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The system includes a computer and a database stored on the computer. The computer is coupled to the gaming machine for tracking a player account. The database stores vouchers. Each voucher has a parameter. The computer assigns a first number of bonus points to a first voucher and assigns the first voucher to the player account.

[0013] In a sixth aspect of the present invention, a system for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The system includes a computer and a database stored on the computer. The computer tracks a player account. The database stores vouchers. Each voucher has a parameter related to an expiration of the voucher. The computer assigns a first number of bonus points to a first voucher, assigns a first expiration date to the parameter of the first voucher, and assigns the first voucher to the player account.

[0014] In a seventh aspect of the present invention, a system for crediting a player of a gaming machine with bonus points is provided. The system includes a computer for tracking a player account and a database stored on the computer for storing vouchers. Each voucher has a parameter. The computer assigns a first number of bonus points to a first voucher, defines the parameter of the first voucher as being one of cashable and

non-cashable, and assigns the first voucher to the player account.

[0015] In an eighth aspect of the present invention, a system includes a gaming machine, a computer, and a database stored on the computer. The gaming machine has a player tracking device and a credit meter. The computer is coupled to the gaming machine for tracking a player account. The database stores information related to the player account. The computer credits the player account with a first number of bonus points, converts the first number of bonus points associated to a first number of credits, and downloads the first number of credits to the player tracking device. The gaming machine allows the player to place a wager and play the gaming machine. The gaming machine also decrements the wager from the credit meter, decrements the maximum wager from the player tracking device, and credits the maximum wager to the credit meter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0017] Figure 1 is block diagram of a system for providing credit to a player of a gaming machine, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0018] Figure 2 is a block diagram of a gaming machine for use with the system of Figure 1;

[0019] Figure 3 is a diagrammatic illustration of a sample database tracking a plurality

of player tracking accounts, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0020] Figure 4 is a diagrammatic illustration of a sample database with a plurality of vouchers assigned to player tracking accounts, according to an embodiment of the present invention;

[0021] Figure 5 is a flow diagram of a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine, according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

[0022] Figure 6 is a flow diagram of a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine, according to a second embodiment of the present invention;

[0023] Figure 7 is a flow diagram of a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine, according to a third embodiment of the present invention;

[0024] Figure 8 is a flow diagram of a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine, according to a fourth embodiment of the present invention;

[0025] Figure 9 is a flow diagram of a method for crediting a player of a gaming machine, according to a fifth embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0026] With reference to the drawings and in operation, the present invention provides a system 10 and method 50, 52, 54, 56, 58 for providing credit to a player of a gaming machine 12. In one embodiment, the system 10 and method 50, 52, 54, 56 may be embodied or implemented via an entertaining management and monitoring system 14 which is shown in block diagram form in Figure 1. The entertainment and monitoring system 14 may include may additional functions such as, real-time multi-site, slot

accounting, player tracking, cage credit and vault, sports book data collection, Point of Sale (POS) accounting, keno accounting, bingo accounting, and table game accounting, a wide area progressive jackpot, and electronic funds transfer (EFT). Two such systems are disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/967,571, filed September 28, 2001, and U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. (not assigned), filed September 11, 2003, (Attorney Docket No. 60518-169), both of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

[0027] As shown, the system 10 includes a plurality of gaming machines 12. Gaming machines 12 may include, but are not limited to electronic gaming machines (such as video slot, video poker machines, or video arcade games), electric gaming machines, virtual gaming machines, e.g., for online gaming, an interface to a table management system (not shown) for table games. In the illustrated embodiment, eight electronic gaming machines (or EGM) 12A-12H are shown. However, it should be noted that the present invention is not limited to any number or type of machines 12. In one embodiment, the machines 12 are organized into banks (not shown), each bank containing a plurality of machines 12.

[0028] Other types of gaming machines which may be included (see above) are indicated with reference number 12I.

[0029] The gaming machines 12 are connected via a network 16 to one or more host computers 18, which are generally located at a remote or central location. The computer 18 includes a computer program application 20 which maintains one or more databases 22. In one embodiment, the database(s) are Oracle database(s).

[0030] The computer program application 20 and databases 22 may be used to record,

track, and report accounting information regarding the gaming machines 12 and players of the gaming machines 12. Additionally, the computer program application 20 and databases 22 may be used to maintain information related to player tracking accounts (see below).

[0031] In general, the gaming machines 12 are playable by a player 24. The player 24 may select one of the gaming machines 12C to play and insert a coin, credit, coupon, and/or player tracking card (not shown) into the chosen EGM 12C. Generally, the gaming machines 12C have an associated number of credits or coins required in order to play. In the case of video slot or poker games, the game is played and an award in the form of credits may be awarded based on a pay table of the gaming machine 12.

[0032] With reference to Figure 2, a block diagram of a suitable electronic gaming machine 12C is shown.

[0033] The machine 12C comprises a game controller 26, or central processing unit (CPU), a coin-bill management device 28, a display processor 30, a RAM 32 as a memory device and a ROM 34 (generally provided as an EPROM). The CPU 26 is mainly composed of a microprocessor unit and performs various calculations and motion control necessary for the progress of the game. The coin-bill management device 28 detects the insertion of a coin or a bill and performs a necessary process for managing the coin and the bill. The display processor 30 interprets commands issued from the CPU 26 and displays desirable images on a display 36. The RAM 32 temporarily stores programs and data necessary for the progress of the game, and the ROM 34 stores, in advance, programs and data for controlling basic operation of the machine 12C, such as

the booting operation thereof, game code and graphics.

[0034] Input to the gaming device 12C may be accomplished via mechanical switches or buttons or via a touchscreen interface (not shown). Such gaming machines 12 are well known in the art and are therefore not further discussed.

[0035] The player 24 is identified via the player tracking card and/or a player identification number entered into player tracking device 38 at each EGM 12 (see below).

Player tracking accounts may be used, generally, to provide bonuses to a player, in addition to the award designated by, in the case of a video slot or poker machine, the EGM's 12 payable. These bonuses may be awarded to the player 24 based a set of criteria, including, but not limited to, a) the player's play on the machine 12C, b) the player's overall play, c) play during a predetermined period of time, and d) the player's birthday or anniversary, or e) any other definable criteria. Additionally, bonuses may be awarded on a random basis, i.e., to a randomly chosen player or randomly chosen game 12. Bonuses may also be awarded in a discretionary manner or based on other criteria, such as, purchases made at a gift shop or other affiliated location.

[0036] In one embodiment, the player tracking device 38 includes a processor 40, a player identification card reader 42 and/or a numeric keypad 44, and a display 46. In one embodiment, the display 46 is a touchscreen panel and the numeric keypad 44 is implemented thereon.

[0037] The player 24 may be identified by entry of a player tracking card into the player identification card reader 42 and/or entry of a player identification number (PIN) on the numeric key pad 46. The play tracking device 38 may also be used to communicate

information between the computer 18 and the corresponding EGM 12C. The player tracking device 40 may also be used to track bonus points, i.e., incentive points or credits, downloaded from the computer 18.

[0038] In one aspect of the present invention, the bonuses are awarded as bonus points. In one embodiment, the bonus points are incentive points. In another embodiment, the bonus points are credits.

[0039] The incentive points may be converted to credits using a predetermined ratio. The predetermined ratio may be 1 or any other desired ratio. The predetermined ratio may also be varied based on determined criteria, e.g., the gaming machine 12 being played, the player, or the time of day. Incentive points may be designated as cashable or non-cashable. As described below, the incentive points in a player account may be downloaded to one of the gaming machines 12 for play.

[0040] Incentive points stored in the player account may be designated as cashable or non-cashable. In one embodiment, the player account may include only cashable incentive points. In another embodiment, the player account may include only non-cashable incentive points. In a third embodiment, the player account may include both cashable and non-cashable incentive points.

[0041] In still another embodiment, the player account may include incentive points, cashable and/or non-cashable, and credits, cashable and/or non-cashable.

[0042] Cashable credits, or incentive points converted into credits, may be downloaded to an EGM 12. When the player has finished playing the EGM 12, any remaining credits may be cashed out, i.e., retrieved as coins or placed on a printed ticket or player tracking

card for redemption or play on another gaming machine 12.

[0043] Non-cashable credits must be played. When the player stops playing an EGM 12C, any remaining non-cashable credits which were downloaded to the EGM 12C are either lost or uploaded back to the player account (see below).

[0044] With reference to Figure 3, the database 22 tracks the player account for each player in the player tracking system. In the illustrated example, the following is tracked for each player: account number, incentive points, name, cashable credits and non-cashable credits. Thus in this example, bonus points in the form of incentive points, cashable credits and non-cashable credits may be awarded.

[0045] With reference to Figure 4, in one aspect of the present invention, bonus points are awarded via electronic vouchers 48, i.e., records in the database 22. A voucher 48 is created each time bonus points are awarded. In the diagrammatic illustration of Figure 4, three vouchers 48A, 48B, 48C are shown. Each voucher 48 has a voucher number and an amount (in the case a dollar or credit amount). Each voucher 48 is assigned to a player account and includes the player account number to which it is assigned. Each voucher 48 may include additional parameters or fields based on the needs of the system 10. For example, an expiration date could be included which gives a date at which the respective voucher 48 expires. The voucher 48 may also designate the bonus points as cashable or non-cashable.

[0046] In one aspect of the present invention the computer 18 may create a first voucher 48 and assign a first number of bonus points to the first voucher 48. The computer 18 may also create a second voucher 48 and assign a second number of bonus

points to the second voucher 48. The first and second vouchers 48 may be assigned to a player account. Each voucher has a parameter. The parameter of the first voucher has a first value and the parameter of the second voucher has a second value.

[0047] In one embodiment, the bonus points are incentive points which may be converted to credits and downloaded to the EGM 12C.

[0048] In another embodiment, the bonus points are credits which may be downloaded to the EGM 12C.

[0049] In one embodiment, the gaming machine 12C may display to the player 24 a list of the vouchers 48 which have been assigned to their player account. The player 24 may then indicate at least one voucher to download. The list may be displayed whenever appropriate, for example, when the player 24 is identified to the system 10, when the player requests the list (through a menu system), when a new voucher has been created, or any other suitable time. In one embodiment, the list may be displayed on the EGM display 36. In another embodiment, the list may be displayed on the player tracking device display 44.

[0050] The first and second values of the parameters of the first and second vouchers 48 may be equal or different. For example, in one embodiment the parameter relates to an expiration date of the respective voucher. The expiration date may be a function of the date of the voucher was created. Thus, the expiration dates of the first and second vouchers 48 may be different if the vouchers 48 were created on different days or may be the same if created on the same day.

[0051] In another embodiment, the parameter is one of cashable and non-cashable. The

computer 18 may designed a voucher 48 as cashable or non-cashable. Typically, this is defined by predefined criteria based on how the voucher 48 was created.

[0052] If the bonus points for a specific voucher 48 are incentive points, the incentive points may be converted to credits prior to downloading to the game machine 12C. As described above, this is done using a predetermined ration which may be 1 or some other ratio.

[0053] In one embodiment, the gaming machine 12 may provide an indication to the player 24 when the first voucher or second voucher 48 has been assigned to the player account. For example, the indication may be an audio signal and/or a visual signal.

[0054] In one embodiment, the parameter may be an expiration date of the respective voucher. Each voucher may also include a second parameter designating the respective bonus points as being cashable or non-cashable.

[0055] In one embodiment, the computer 18 may convert the first number of bonus points to a first number of credits and download the first number of credits to the player tracking device 38.

[0056] In another embodiment, the gaming machine 12 has a credit meter for tracking available credits for play of the gaming machine by the player 24. The computer 18 may convert the first number of bonus points to a first number of credits and download the first number of credits to the credit meter.

[0057] In one embodiment, the parameter may be one lump-sum and pay for play. The computer 18 may convert the first number of bonus points to credits and download the credits to the credit meter if the first voucher 48 is designated as lump-sum.

[0058] In one embodiment of the present invention, the gaming machine 12 is capable of accepting a variable wager. The variable wager has a maximum wager value or MAX BET. In one embodiment, the maximum wager value is equal to the lesser of a value defined by the configuration of the gaming machine 12, a value defined by the incentive setup, or the remaining balance of bonus points. The computer 18 converts the first number of bonus points associated with the first voucher 48 to a first number of credits and downloads the first number of bonus points to the player tracking device 38 as credits. The gaming machine 12C allows the player 24 to place a wager and play the gaming machine 12C. The gaming machine 12C decrements the wager from the credit meter, decrements the maximum wager from the player tracking device 38, and credits the maximum wager to the credit meter in response to the player 24 playing the gaming machine 12C.

[0059] With reference to Figure 5, in one aspect of the present invention, a method 50 credits a player 24 of the gaming machine 12C with bonus points. The player 24 has a player account stored on the computer 18. The computer 18 includes the database 22 for storing vouchers 48. Each voucher 48 has at least one parameter. In a first step 50A, a first number of bonus points is assigned to a first voucher 48. The parameter of the first voucher 48 has a first value. In a second step 50B, the first voucher 48 is assigned to the player account. In a third step 50C, a second number of bonus points is assigned to a second voucher 48. The parameter of the second voucher has a second value. In a fourth step 50D, the second voucher 48 is assigned to the player account.

[0060] With reference to Figure 6, a method 52 credits a player of the gaming machine

12C with bonus points. The player 24 has a player account stored on computer 18. The computer 18 includes a database for storing vouchers 48. Each voucher 48 has a parameter related to an expiration of the voucher 48. In a first step 52A, a first number of bonus points is assigned to a first voucher 48. In a second step 52B, a first expiration date is assigned to the first voucher. In a third step 52C, the first voucher 48 is assigned to the player account.

[0061] With reference to Figure 7, in another aspect of the present invention a method 54 credits a player of the gaming machine 12C with bonus points. The player 24 has a player account stored in the computer 18. The computer 18 includes a database for storing vouchers 48. Each voucher 48 has a parameter. In a first step 54A, a first number of bonus point is assigned to a first voucher. In a second step 54B, the parameter of the first voucher 48 is defined as one of cashable and non-cashable. In a third step 54C, the first voucher 48 is assigned to the player account.

[0062] With reference to Figure 8, in still one more aspect of the present invention a method 56 credits a player of an gaming machine 12 with bonus points. The gaming machine 12 is capable of accepting a variable wager. The variable wager has a maximum wager value (MAX BET). The player 24 has a player account stored on the computer 18. In a first step 56A, the player account is credited with a first number of bonus points. In a second step 56B, the first number of bonus points is downloaded to the player tracking device 38 as a first number of credits. In a third step 56C, the player 24 places a wager. In a fourth step 56D, the gaming machine 12 is played. In a fifth step 56E, the wager is decremented from the credit meter. In a sixth step 56F, the maximum wager is

decremented from the player tracking device 38. In a seventh step 56G, the maximum wager is credited to the credit meter.

[0063] With reference to Figure 9, in a still further aspect of the present invention, a method 58 credits a player of a gaming machine 12 with bonus points. The gaming machine is capable of accepting a variable wager. The variable wager has a maximum wager value (MAX BET). The player 24, has a player account stored on the computer 18. In a first step 56B, the player account is credited with a first number of bonus points. In a second step 58B, the bonus points are downloaded to the player tracking device 38 as credits. In a third step 58C, the player 24 places a wager. In a fourth step 58D, the gaming machine 12 is played. In a fifth step 58D, if the total of the player's wagers are greater or equal to a predetermined value, i.e., a predetermined match play amount, then the method 58 proceeds to a sixth step 58F. Otherwise, the method 58 allows the player 24 to place another wager. In the sixth step 58F, the match play amount is decremented from the player tracking device 38. In a seventh step 58G, the match play amount is credited to the credit meter.

[0064] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. The invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described within the scope of the appended claims